

EVERYONE is
WELCOME!
WELCOME!

WAUNAKEE

COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

2026 WI State Education Convention

If Walls Could Talk, What Would Your Students Say About Belonging?

January 21, 2026

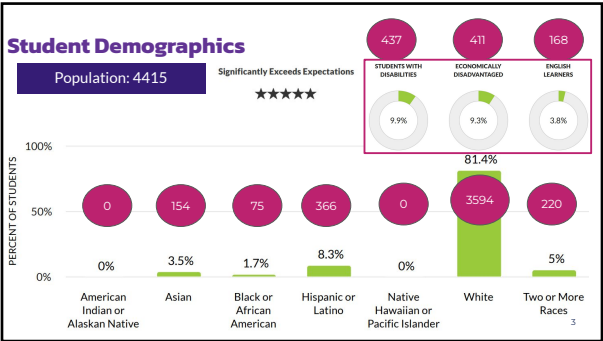


Kim Walters

Tiffany Loken

Laurice Snyder

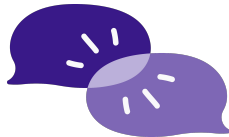








What thoughts or questions did this video prompt for you?





What the Research Says

Belonging is a Protective Factor

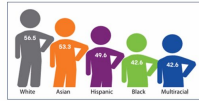
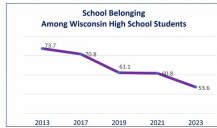
- ✓ Improves mental and physical health
- ✓ Less emotional distress and suicidality
- ✓ Less likely to misuse substances
- ✓ Helps to build trusting relationships
- ✓ Improves academic outcomes
- ✓ Higher income after graduation



 Why Belonging Matters



Belonging Trends



Data Highlights

<https://children.wi.gov/Pages/ResearchData/AnnualReport.aspx>



What the Research Says

*Students' sense of belonging is linked to positive academic outcomes (Osterman, 2000), including **higher grades, higher student engagement** (Furrer & Skinner, 2003), **self-confidence** (Pittman & Richmond, 2007), and **acceptance** (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). Students with a stronger sense of belonging, and connectedness to their school community, tend to have **better academic and wellbeing outcomes** than their peers with a less strong sense of belonging (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996).*



What the Research Says

Belonging interventions show the largest positive impact on Black students, significantly improving identity, engagement and long-term outcomes.

(Corbin-Thaddies, 2022)



What the Research Says

Students who feel a strong sense of belonging are 2.2 times more likely to be engaged in their learning.

(OECD PISA Student Well-Being Report)



What the Research Says

Belonging boosts employee performance and retention. Employees with a strong sense of belonging show a 56% increase in job performance, a 50% drop in turnover risk, and 75% fewer sick days. (Harvard Business Review, 2019)



What the Research Says

Staff who feel connected contribute more and stay longer. Educators who report high levels of belonging are 2X more likely to stay in their role the following year.

- Gallup Education Workforce Report, 2023



Findings: District Average: Environment

Indicator 1.6: Teacher uses body language, gestures, and expressions to convey a message that all students' questions and opinions are important	2.63
Indicator 1.5: Teacher uses proximity with all students equitably	2.45
Indicator 1.7: Student work samples are displayed emphasizing effort.	2.12
Indicator 1.1: Bulletin boards, displays, instructional materials, and other visuals in the classroom positively reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds represented by students and the community.	2.04
Indicator 1.3: Teacher instructs and models a growth mindset and emphasizes effort.	1.94
Overall Average Rating	2.20



Findings: School #1 Average - Environment

Indicator 1.6: Teacher uses body language, gestures, and expressions to convey a message that all students' questions and opinions are important	2.61
Indicator 1.5: Teacher uses proximity with all students equitably	2.54
Indicator 1.3: Teacher instructs and models a growth mindset and emphasizes effort.	2.11
Indicator 1.1: Bulletin boards, displays, instructional materials, and other visuals in the classroom positively reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds represented by students and the community.	2.05
Indicator 1.7: Student work samples are displayed emphasizing effort.	1.97
Overall Average Rating	2.22



Findings: School #2 - Environment

Indicator 1.6: Teacher uses body language, gestures, and expressions to convey a message that all students' questions and opinions are important	2.19
Indicator 1.5: Teacher uses proximity with all students equitably	2.09
Indicator 1.7: Student work samples are displayed emphasizing effort.	1.92
Indicator 1.3: Teacher instructs and models a growth mindset and emphasizes effort.	1.77
Indicator 1.1: Bulletin boards, displays, instructional materials, and other visuals in the classroom positively reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds represented by students and the community.	1.64
Overall Average Rating	1.89



Findings: District Average - Relationships

Indicator 2.3: Teacher provides equitable opportunities for support and participation	2.54
Indicator 2.7: Teacher allows students to know them as a person in meaningful ways.	2.25
Indicator 2.8: Students are heard taking intellectual risks, and validating and affirming each other's learning and thinking.	2.21
Indicator 2.14: Teacher inquires about life beyond the school environment to connect with students' funds of knowledge	2.00
Indicator 2.9: Teacher welcomes students by name or nickname as they enter the classroom or building.	1.98
Overall Average Rating	2.37



Findings: School #1 Average - Relationships

Indicator 2.3: Teacher provides equitable opportunities for support and participation	2.72
Indicator 2.8: Students are heard taking intellectual risks, and validating and affirming each other's learning and thinking.	2.57
Indicator 2.7: Teacher allows students to know them as a person in meaningful ways.	2.45
Indicator 2.14: Teacher inquires about life beyond the school environment to connect with students' funds of knowledge	2.15
Indicator 2.9: Teacher welcomes students by name or nickname as they enter the classroom or building.	2.00
Overall Average Rating	2.52

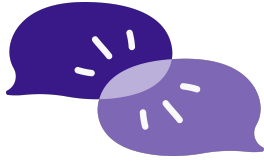


Findings: School #2 - Relationships

Indicator 2.3: Teacher provides equitable opportunities for support and participation	2.31
Indicator 2.7: Teacher allows students to know them as a person in meaningful ways.	2.04
Indicator 2.8: Students are heard taking intellectual risks, and validating and affirming each other's learning and thinking.	1.83
Indicator 2.14: Teacher inquires about life beyond the school environment to connect with students' funds of knowledge	1.69
Indicator 2.9: Teacher welcomes students by name or nickname as they enter the classroom or building.	1.54
Overall Average Rating	1.98

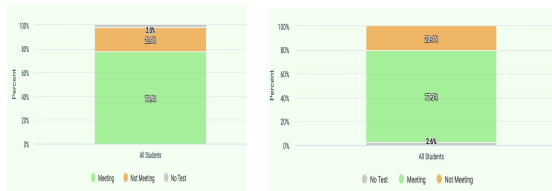


Which school is higher performing academically?



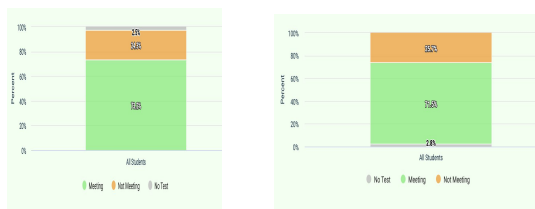


School #1: Forward Exam - Math & Reading





School #2: Forward Exam - Math & Reading





Belonging & Engagement Walks

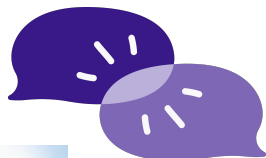
- Our data show that not all of our students feel they belong in our schools (71% of white students report feeling a sense of belonging in their school and 55% of students who identify as being of multiple races feel the same.) *Dane County Youth Assessment: Grades 7-12*
- Provide baseline data for the district Disproportionality Plan and reflection opportunities within site/district teams

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What does belonging look like in your school?

What does it feel like when it is present—or when it is missing?



03:00



Belonging & Engagement Walk Process



- 2 consultants & 3 school/district personnel
- Baseline themes
- Up to 10 indicators
 - Relationships
 - Environment
 - Instructional Strategy
 - School Culture
 - Curriculum & Resources
 - Facilities



Examples of Indicators

Environment	Relationships
<p>1.1 Bulletin boards, displays, instructional materials, and other visuals in the classroom positively reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds represented by students and the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Posters - real people, not cartoons• Represents a variety of cultures, races, nationalities, abilities, family structures• Students and/or families represented with photos or self-portraits• Teacher is intentional and exerts purposeful effort to reverse the negative stereotypes of non-mainstream cultures and languages portrayed in historical perspectives.	<p>2.9 Teacher welcomes students by name or nickname as they enter the classroom or building.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Good morning, good afternoon ____!"• "Welcome back ____!"• "____, are you feeling better?"• Hug, handshake, high five (with name)

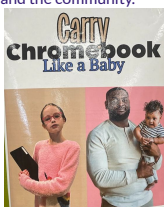


Belonging & Engagement Walks - Environment Indicators

- **Indicator 1.1:** Bulletin boards, displays, instructional materials, and other visuals in the classroom positively reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds represented by students and the community
- **Indicator 1.3:** Teacher instructs and models a growth mindset and emphasizes effort
- **Indicator 1.5:** Teacher uses proximity with all students equitably
- **Indicator 1.6:** Teacher uses body language, gestures, and expressions to convey a message that all student's questions and opinions are important.
- **Indicator 1.7:** Student work samples are displayed



Indicator 1.1: Bulletin boards, displays, instructional materials, and other visuals in the classroom positively reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds represented by students and the community.





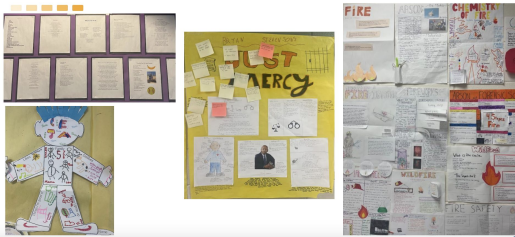
Indicator 1.3: Teacher instructs and models a growth mindset and emphasizes effort



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Indicator 1.7: Student work samples are displayed



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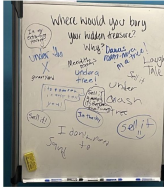
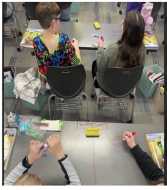
Belonging & Engagement Walks - Relationship Indicators

- **Indicator 2.3:** Teacher provides equitable opportunities for support and participation
- **Indicator 2.7:** Teacher allows students to know them as a person in meaningful ways.
- **Indicator 2.8:** Students are heard taking intellectual risks, validating and affirming each other's learning and thinking.
- **Indicator 2.9:** Teacher welcomes students by name or nickname as they enter the classroom or building.
- **Indicator 2.14:** Teacher inquires about life beyond the school environment to connect with students' funds of knowledge

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Indicator 2.3: Teacher provides equitable opportunities for support and participation



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Indicator 2.7: Teacher allows students to know them as a person in meaningful ways.



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Indicator 2.14: Teacher inquires about life beyond the school environment to connect with students' funds of knowledge



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Celebrations



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"The Belonging Walk was one of my best days as an administrator in several years. I had the opportunity to take the time to see all of the great things that are occurring in our classrooms. It was awesome to be able to work closely with my colleagues on something that truly matters. I hope to have the opportunity to do it again as it helps to remind me why we do what we do."

Brian Borowski, Principal at Waunakee Community High School



Parent Voices: Impact of When Students Don't Belong






- Continued

How are we evaluating progress?

District Continuous Improvement Goals			
Goal #1 Student Learning, Supports, & Experiences	Goal #2 Staff Learning, Supports, & Experiences	Goal #3 Budget, Facility, Safety, & Technology	Goal #4 Communications & Stakeholder Engagement
By June 2029, all Waunakee Community School District Schools will significantly exceed expectations on the Wisconsin State Accountability Report Card.	Prioritize efforts to enhance staff recruitment and retention.	Establish a budget reflective of district priorities and school board budget parameters and maintain facilities and learning environments that are safe and meet the growing needs of the district and community.	Continue with the implementation and enhancement of the Communication and Engagement Plan.



New Building Level Goals: Belonging & Engagement

Goal: 100% of teaching staff will implement school-wide routines and explicitly teach self-management skills

- Progress monitored by student survey scores based on their understanding of behavior expectations and their self-management skills



New Building Level Goals: Belonging & Engagement

Highlights (Strengths from Student Survey):

- 97% of students know the **Speak Up at School** strategies and are aware of the SUSO online tool
- 96% of students agree that **classroom agreements** help them understand what the learning environment should look and sound like
- 91% of students feel **they belong** here when they walk around the classroom/village



New Building Level Goals: Belonging & Engagement

Next Steps (Areas of improvement from Student Survey):

- 18% of students feel **adults are not using common language** when addressing concerns
- Promoting **mindfulness** during the school day



New Building Goals: Belonging & Engagement

Target: At the conclusion of the 2025-26 school year, school wide student attendance will increase to 96% and chronic absenteeism will decrease to 6%.

Progress:

- Family contact
- Second Step Bullying Prevention Unit
- Tucker Tuesday's

Next Steps:

- Belonging and Engagement Walk data collection- welcoming students



Next Steps.....

- Replicate the work of our highest performing buildings
- Repeat Belonging & Engagement Walks - Spring of 2026
- Monitor progress of school improvement goals
- Continue our work with Kim & Laurice



Materials & Resources

Understanding the Belonging & Engagement Walk Process

This page provides a detailed overview of the Belonging & Engagement Walk process, including the purpose, objectives, and steps involved. It also includes a table for recording the results of the walk.

Increase Student Engagement

This page provides a detailed overview of the Increase Student Engagement process, including the purpose, objectives, and steps involved. It also includes a table for recording the results of the walk.



Lightbulb Moments?





THANK YOU
